DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 335 908 FL 019 393

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TITLE International Business Culture: Merging Business with Foreign Language Cultural Expertise.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 20p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Administration Education; *Course Descriptions; *Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Differences; Higher Education; *International Trade; *Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning
IDENTIFIERS Ashland University OH

ABSTRACT

This report considers how the different departments of business administration and foreign languages can cooperate to create coursework that will benefit students in both areas of study. The ignorance many U.S. citizens have of the world is taken into consideration. Although foreign language majors have greater exposure to the world, this knowledge is limited to regional and/or ethnic areas. To further educate students about the demands of international business, a course was developed at Ashland University that attempts to relay to students the impact of cultural differences, including the following factors: (1) the necessity of communication; (2) the role of social institutions and a sense of time; (3) the significance of producing and consuming; and (4) the various definitions of the quality of life. (Author/JL)

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INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS CULTURE: MERGING BUSINESS WITH FOREIGN LANGUAGE CULTURAL EXPERTISE

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to consider how the different departments of business administration and foreign languages can cooperate to create coursework that will benefit students in both areas of study. Taken into consideration is the ignorance most citizens of the U.S. have toward the rest of the world. Although foreign language majors have greater exposure to the world, this knowledge is limited to regional and/or ethnic areas. To further educate students about the demands of international business, a course was developed that attempts to relay to students the impact of cultural differences, including the following factors: 1) the necessity of communication, 2) the role of social institutions and a sense of time, 3) the significance of producing and consuming, and 4) the various definitions of the quality of life.

International Business Culture: Merging Business with Foreign Language Cultural Expertise

Antagonism, while negative when it is allowed to rule one's nature, can have positive and productive outcomes if used to improve the nature of the beast. So it is with Business and Foreign Language Studies.

Why is there, as one colleague pointed out, a distrust and dislike between these two areas of study? Of course, this lack of understanding comes from someone who fell in love with Spain at a tender age, majored in Spanish as an undergraduate, earned a Master in International Management degree, and now teaches marketing. Historically, there are many reasons for the existing antipathy; yet these two fields are so complementary in nature that future "joint ventures" must be considered, to the advantage of both disciplines.

Americans' awareness of international issues is appalling. We are ocean-bound. We dismiss the Canadians, as they are "just like us." We dismiss the Mexicans with even less consideration. The British are acceptable.

The French are rude. While studying ancient civilizations, we rarely consider that the Italians are the heirs to the many positive values of the Roman Empire. The Germans are efficient and deserve a little respect because they are a lot like us. Africa is rarely considered. The Ayhatolla is perceived as the essence of all Arab nations. The Japanese are out for revenge. All other Pacific-Rim countries are out to get Japan. And China is incomprehensible. I've covered most of the world. Any country not included is either "a lot like us" or not worthy of consideration. If I've offended anyone, the point has been missed.

Many business students have this domestic view of the world. Foreign language students are more aware, but even their knowledge tends to be regional rather than global: Spanish majors know Spain and Latin America; they know little of Africa or Asia. French majors know France and perhaps a colony or two. How, then, do we communicate to college students the essence of "foreign-ness" in one semester?

The first step is to develop a business or applied language program that will expose the student to the vagaries and nuances of an alien culture. The second

step is to continue to strengthen any liberal arts program so it is in step with the socio-cultural changes surrounding us. The goal of all teachers is to prepare our students to think in order to achieve successful lives in a world they can comprehend.

In 1983, Ashland University instituted a program geared to the integration of different disciplines, called "Life Activity" courses. Someone read Magister Ludi and, thus, we began to play the Glass Bead Game. These courses were to be designed to convey to students:

1. the necessity of communication;
2. the role of social institutions and a sense of time;
3. the significance of producing and consuming; and
4. the various definitions of the quality of life.

The first goal, therefore, was to explore any of the multiple forms of verbal and non-verbal communications used by man. One focus of the course was on the many problems of communication between a citizen of the "privileged" U.S. and a citizen of lesser developed and/or "non-western" countries. This included language barriers as well as cultural

barriers, either of which may prohibit true understanding. One example of differences that was considered was the impact of technology on some nation other than the U.S. The level of technology as well as the increase of technology and the rate or speed of industrialization were also considered.

The second goal was to explore those institutions that are vital to the success of humankind, past, present and future. The systems of government and education of the U.S. were to be compared with those of certain target areas. For example, in the first semester of the course, the focus was on Latin America. Students explored how these variations in governments and political ideologies on this continent affect business. The history of several countries in a particular world area was reviewed to better show how current institutions are outgrowths of the culture and values of a nation. The role of religion was also taken into account, as it reflects or is a reflection of the politics and business climate.

The third goal was to explore the definition and significance of meaningful life. The culture and

attitudes of the work force in the countries being investigated were considered. Again, the history of the country, the regard for human life and welfare, and the values attached to wealth, family and work all influence what is termed meaningful in a nation.

Finally, the fourth goal focused on exploring the interrelationships between people, other life forms, the environment and a supreme being. The current roles of U.S. businesses in a world area were considered. Questions such as, "what effect has foreign business had, culturally as well as economically?" and "have U.S. interventions been positive or negative, and in what aspects?" Patriotism and nationalism were examined, especially as these effect foreigners doing business in another country.

Based on these four goals, the course, Latin American Studies, was first offered Spring of 1984 and was taught to five students. The initial focus was on Latin America because of greater faculty expertise in this area. However, the title was soon changed to International Business Culture to gain a broader appeal, especially among the many foreign students at Ashland University. Since that first time, the class

has filled within the first week of registration. Even students can recognize a good thing if they're so required.

The course was initially "team-taught," with Dr. Otilia Salmon, the former chairperson of the Ashland University foreign language department, teaching culture; I taught the integration of culture into business activities. Since the third year I have taught the course alone. However, it is recognized that the team-teaching is a necessary component to this course.

Much of the course revolves around discussion and lecture. Students attempt to relate the "culture shock" they experienced when first coming to college, to the shock of living in an alien culture. It has been found that this comparison is valid and the students can better relate to a foreign culture if its differences can be compared to something they have experienced. Indeed, I have had several students write to me after graduation and tell me they were better able to cope with the culture shock encountered when entering the "real world" because they were able to integrate some of what they learned in this course to the shock they were now feeling. In addition to lecture and discussion, the students are also exposed

to a variety of videos. These include The Colonel Comes to Japan and Hong Kong Dresses Up, from the Dryden Press Enterprise series, and Cold Water, from Boston University.

While the text, Big Business Blunders (Ricks, Irwin Press) points out mistakes that have been made when a corporation enters the global market unprepared, the first two movies show some successes. These show that success can be enhanced by good planning, but an element of luck (as in all business dealings), the necessity of thinking on one's feet, and the ability to adapt also play a big part in any success.

The last movie, Cold Water, portrays the culture shock that foreigners experience when coming to the U.S. It is used not only to make American students more understanding of and sympathetic toward Ashland's foreign students, but also to show them their own culture from others' points of view. Initially most students react with great hostility toward this movie. They defend their own culture, which to their point of view is not superficial, cold or insincere. Yet, many come back later in the semester to tell me that there is a bit of truth to these observations. When

Americans say, "How are you?", they really do not want to know, at least not in great detail. Americans make and change friends easily, a perhaps necessary characteristic in a transient society. We don°t think we are insincere or politic; we are products of our culture.

One of the challenges of this course is to teach to Americans the fact that many foreign cultures are simply different, based on different values and beliefs that are nonetheless valid. This is difficult to do if the students have never traveled or lived in a foreign country. People, in general, don't recognize their own culture as such until they've been exposed to an alien culture. To help this understanding of intrinsic differences in other cultures, we play the cross-cultural game, Bafa-Bafa (Shirts, Simile II). The results, confusion, misunderstanding, lack of communication and offensive behavior are laughable. Yet, this exposes the students to the problems of communicating with an alien culture without threatening their belief in their own values. The debriefing following the game is usually filled with good debate and a great deal of insight into the differences

between cultures. Of course, it is up to the leader to point out the important lessons and to reinforce the validity of the game.

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of the course is dealing with those Americans who have a high degree of ethnocentricity, who are xenophobic. I have had two students in the past five years who changed not one attitude or misconception about other cultures over the semester. Both thought I showed the movies to expose how foolish foreigners are; both thought the purpose of Bafa-Bafa was to display the idiocy of cultures that are different from ours. Neither student knew the other, but if they had met and had been told they were alike, they would both have been horribly offended. One of the students argued bitterly and vehemently with a guest speaker from Latin America who was trying to show how insensitive "Norte Americanos" can be. This student's parting words as I removed him from the class were, "If you don't like the way we do things in America, go back where you came from!" Obviously, he had a quick wit and a gift for clever repartee.

I mention my failures to show how narrow minded we

Americans can be. There were very positive outcomes as a result of these two students. Their attitude tended to polarize the class. The rest of the students did not approve of such rudeness. Whatever they had thought prior to the inevitable confrontation I had with these "problem children," the end result was that the rest of the class was shocked enough to take a hard look at themselves. All at least attempted to become more sensitive toward and respectful of values and cultures different from their own.

How, in the end, does one evaluate increased cultural awareness? It is difficult to test and to measure. During the second year International Business Culture was offered, a pre-test/post-test was developed, included in appendix 1, designed to measure at least a portion of what might be considered cross-cultural awareness. Appendix 2 shows the current pre-test/post-test that has evolved out of the original. The latter test was initially administered to Ashland University's business faculty during a two-day retreat which focused on increasing intercultural awareness. The faculty showed no dramatic change in their attitudes, due, I believe, to two factors. First, the faculty members

who attended the retreat were those most interested in global business. Second, because of that interest, most were fairly well aware of cross-cultural issues and most had traveled or lived abroad. The college students taking the course have tended to show dramatic changes in their attitudes, mostly toward a more positive or accepting frame of mind.

The final issue of this paper is to discuss the role this course served as a spring-board to introduce other international business courses. Shortly before International Business Culture received catalog status, Ashland University received a grant to "internationalize" its business curriculum. The interest the creation of this course caused motivated greater university support for internationalizing all academic areas. Ashland University has worked to develop more thoroughly a study-abroad program geared to the needs of all students. More professors campus-wide have increased course coverage to include international and global issues. The foreign language department has hired three new professionals, and now offers Japanese and Chinese in addition to the standards of French, Spanish and German. The business department has created an

international marketing competition, currently in-house, with plans to develop it into a state-wide invitational contest. Currently in development is a course on global management.

The traditional antagonism between the Arts and the Professions must fall by the wayside. For Americans to compete in the global market, they must be thoroughly educated, not only in business but also in language, art, literature and culture. Greater cooperation between scholastic disciplines is absolutely necessary in order for educators to help mold the finest graduates possible. To survive in the next century, Americans must understand that Africa is not a country and that the Moslem religion is as full of the richness, diversity and strife as is the Christian religion. All disciplines benefit. The students we serve benefit. And, of course, it's great fun.

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PRE-TEST

International Business Culture

Please answer all of the questions to the best of your knowledge. Your answers will not affect your grade in any way. They will help the professor to know the composition of the class and therefore help to gear the lectures accordingly. There is no need for you to sign your name.

I. PERSONAL DOMAIN

1. Why are you attending this retreat?

2. How old are you?

3. Are you from Ashland? YES NO From a city? YES NO

4. Are you a descendant of immigrants? YES NO

5. From which country(s) were your grandparents or parents?

   1. _____ 2. _____

   3. _____ 4. _____

6. Are you bilingual? YES NO What languages(s) do you speak?

   _____ _____ _____

7. What languages(s) do you speak at home?

   _____ _____ _____

8. What language do your grandparents speak between themselves?

   _____

9. Are you studying or have you studied a foreign language? YES NO

   Which one? _____

10. For how long? 1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years

    _____ months _____ weeks Circle one.

11. Do you listen to international events? YES NO

12. What was the latest news that you (circle one) Heard? Read?

    Listened to?

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13. What country was it about? _____

II. INTERNATIONAL AWARENESS

1. WRITE down the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the following countries mentioned:

China _____ S. Africa _____

France _____ Germany _____

Holland _____ Bolivia _____

Colombia _____ Wales _____

Russia _____ Brazil _____

Nicaragua _____ Japan _____

Iran _____ Nigeria _____

Kuwait _____ Australia _____

2. Please check 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5, with one being the most interested in the following. How interested would you be in meeting someone from one of the following world areas?

	1	2	3	4	5
Africa					
USSR					
Central America					
South America					
Far East					
Europe					
Middle East					

III. KNOWLEDGE OF CULTURE

1. What does the word "culture" mean to you?

Can we measure culture? YES NO If your answer is YES, please explain.

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How would you rank the cultures that you know, have read about or studied?

Please name and rank them with one being the least and five being the greatest.

Name of country	1	2	3	4	5
_____					
_____					
_____					
_____					
_____					

2. Do you believe that all people are equal? YES NO

3. Do you believe that there are many right ways of doing the same thing? YES NO

4. Would you say that what may be right for one culture could be wrong in another culture? Give an example.

5. Do you think that you can know a person's station in life by his tone of voice or accent? Explain.

6. Can you know a person by the clothes he/she wears?

7. Is clothing important?

8. Can you judge someone by the way he eats? e.g., knife and fork? Etc.? YES NO

9. Would you choose something to eat by its smell? YES NO

10. By its looks? YES NO

11. Would you refuse to eat something because of the way it look or smells? Give examples.

IV. CULTURE AND BUSINESS

1. You are seeking a job in the business world. There is a job that you can get, but you will be stationed abroad. What is your first reaction?

2. If you should accept it, what are some of the things that you would do in preparation for your overseas experience?

3. Do you have a country of preference where you would like to work? Name it.

4. Some executives from Comfitanya are coming to visit your firm, and you are asked to meet them. What are some of the things that you would do in preparation for your guests?

5. You are now sent to the foreign country as an executive. Are you going to delegate tasks to the employees? Are you going to solicit their opinions on decisions that will affect the company. Why?

6. Will you consult with the folks in managerial positions in the company who are nationals of that country before promoting someone that <u>you</u>, as an executive, consider is worthy of promotion? Why?

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OPINION QUESTIONS

There are no right or wrong answers here. Place an X on the scale where you feel it best describes your response.

Agree	Disagree	
		1. Control of a foreign culture can help to cope with the unfamiliar.
		2. Knowledge of a second language and culture can help people adapt to a world in transition.
		3. Knowledge of a culture gives understanding of the complexities of cultures.
		4. People can gain insight with the study of another language and culture.
		5. A person needs to learn how to communicate with people of other cultures.
		6. Learning another person's culture does not mean having to change your own.
		7. Studying another culture helps you to understand your own culture better.
		8. Career education in culture can prepare students for richer personal experiences when opportunities arise.
		9. The study of cultures should be for all students regardless of their future educational plans.
		10. I will be able to communicate better by understanding the other person's culture.

I hope that you have given me your honest opinion. If you have not, could you go over those sections and correct them? This information will help me to make your seven weeks one of the most exciting and rewarding experiences that you will have this semester.